



Missouri Coalition for the Environment  
EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ACTION SINCE 1969

# THE ALERT

VOL. 53 | ISSUE 1

## DEEPENING OUR COMMITMENT: MISSOURI FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH



Coldwater Creek

MCE has worked on nuclear and other hazardous waste issues throughout Missouri for decades, and recently we have been engaged with addressing the public health disaster at West Lake Landfill and Coldwater Creek. In partnership with Just Moms STL, we were successful in receiving a record of decision from the EPA in 2018 to commit to a cleanup of approximately 70% of the nuclear waste at West Lake Landfill, and we have worked with other community groups over the years to sound the alarm about Coldwater Creek. These hazardous sites have caused irreparable damage to the lives of thousands of people, and they will... ***continued on page 2.***

## SUSTAINER SPOTLIGHT: PETER RAVEN

At age seven, Peter Raven was initially intrigued by insects after reading a book about them. He looked for them in his backyard in San Francisco, but his childhood interest quickly transitioned to plants once he learned there were far more insects to track than plants. Peter says it was easier to learn about a plant's origin than an insect's, as mentioned in his autobiography, *Driven by Nature: A Personal Journey from Shanghai to Botany and Global Sustainability.*

Raven, President Emeritus of the Missouri Botanical Garden, worked for the Garden for 40 years. He is one of the world's leading botanists and advocates for biodiversity and conservation. Even during retirement, he remains focused on issues affecting the environment, especially the climate crisis. When Raven began his career in botany, he was unaware that plant species were becoming extinct. It was not until the 1970s that climate change was an issue... ***continued on page 3.***

### WHAT'S INSIDE:



PAGE 4 FARM BILL 2023



PAGE 6 Q&A WITH JUST MOMS STL

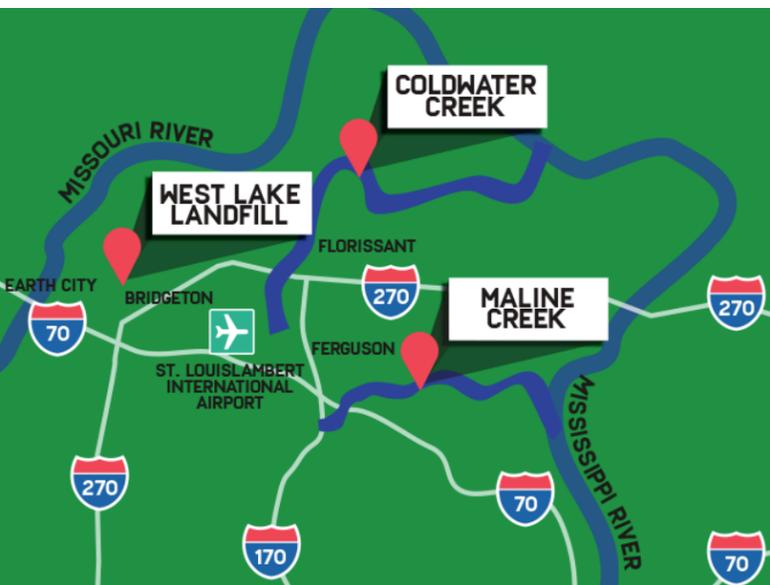


PAGE 11 BOOSTING EFFORTS OF ECO-FRIENDLY

## DEEPENING OUR COMMITMENT

they are cleaned up and people are removed from harm's way.

This is why we have partnered with Just Moms STL once again to engage in a broad community outreach program to educate people who are unaware of the dangers these places continue to pose on the people living and working near them. With the help of the Missouri Foundation for Health, we have hired a new staff person, Moesha Baptiste (see our new staff update for more info about Moesha), who will work alongside Just Moms STL to inform thousands of new people in North St. Louis City and County about these hazardous sites, and they will engage with the community to address other hazardous sites they have identified as a concern. In partnership with others, MCE will create an historical online resource that will detail the nearly 80 year nuclear legacy of St. Louis, which will provide future generations an easily understandable resource to detail what has taken place, where are the sites of concern, and who the responsible parties have been.



Another site that has already been identified as a concern by the community is Maline Creek, also known as Moline Creek. There is evidence of extreme erosion in some locations of the creek

bank that are causing damage to people's yards and homes, there is a concern about asbestos being left in the creek bed near an abandoned asbestos manufacturing site, and there may be other toxic substances in the water and surrounding soils due to its proximity to a PFAS site at the St. Louis Lambert International Airport. Furthermore, we will conduct water tests at these sites to measure the extent of contamination they have suffered, which will provide hard evidence of the pollution the people living and working near these waterways have endured.

Our combined outreach efforts will involve door knocking, attending and hosting public meetings and events, meeting with government agencies, and working with elected officials to raise the profile of these issues with the ultimate goal being to remove these hazardous materials and protect people's environmental health. We will also follow the lead of the communities we work with to ensure their concerns and needs are being met regarding these environmental issues; such as advocating for buyouts, further testing from government agencies, comprehensive health studies, etc.

The Missouri Foundation for Health is funding this effort for the next three years, but we anticipate the need will continue well beyond that timeframe. This is why we will also work to assist community groups, such as our partner Just Moms STL, to build their capacity to tackle these problems even as funding resources shift. In order to resolve these problems as expeditiously as possible, we will need consistent public pressure coming from a multitude of individuals and organizations on our elected officials and government agencies to follow through with cleanups and to ensure people are centered in those efforts.

There are many obstacles to accomplish our goals to protect people and their environment, but people like Dawn Chapman and Karen Nickel from Just Moms STL, nuclear activist and one of our founding members Kay Drey, our fearless and brilliant staff, our volunteers and members, and anyone who cares about their environment all give us hope. We will succeed, and it is everyone's combined efforts that will make it so.



## SUSTAINER SPOTLIGHT: PETER RAVEN

at the same level of consumption as we do in the United States, then four copies of the planet would be needed to maintain that consumption." Raven continues, "If we don't give a damn, then nothing changes, and the worst predictions will come true."

**“People can do their part by starting with their own yards, neighborhoods, and parks. People can compost, reduce their meat consumption, and use electric cars to reduce their footprint.”**

deemed worthy enough to be taken seriously, and it was the biggest factor for species extinction.

Through conservation, the climate crisis can be addressed in a huge way. Farmland is affected through desertification; however, there are great programs in place for restoration. In the Kansas City region, there have been successful efforts to build community gardens and assist with promoting native plantings that assist with soil health, pollinators, and other ecological and human benefits. Raven notes that if we do not address climate change aggressively, then the impact on our ecological systems in Missouri and elsewhere will be dramatic. For instance, Missouri may no longer be able to grow corn and soybeans in 20-30 years. Missouri's climate will instead be more closely related to central Georgia. Fortunately, our state is a budding leader in conservation, and many individuals and organizations are changing their practices to address the problem.

Climate change is not just a local issue, though; it is an international crisis, and it is costly. Income inequality and individual actions exacerbate the crisis. Raven states, "If everyone on Earth lived

Raven says, "People can do their part by starting with their own yards, neighborhoods, and parks. People can compost, reduce their meat consumption, and use electric cars to reduce their footprint. Also, joining organizations like MCE to stay engaged and staying abreast of environmental issues at the political level and making elected officials aware of those issues can make a difference, collectively." This is what gives Peter and all of us at MCE hope.



# FARM BILL 2023: FIVE PRIORITIES & HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED!

Federal food and farm policies impact Missouri’s farmers, families, and environment. Agriculture, depending on the scale of the operations and the methods used, can either be part of the problem or the solution to climate change. Small-scale, environmentally responsible farmers understand the opportunity they have to build soil health, make their land resilient against flooding, and diversify their operations in a way that allows for greater resiliency in the face of drought while protecting against mass crop loss from pests. They do not take this opportunity for granted. They farm with intention, ensuring the food they grow does not harm the communities and wildlife around them or downstream and that the food is nutritious and safe for consumers. MCE actively supports environmentally-responsible farmers through our policy work and this spring starts our efforts to ensure the 2023 Farm Bill provides equitable and accessible opportunities for small-scale farmers, especially farmers of color, who are stewards of our natural resources. Communities of color have been systematically discriminated against in terms of access to government farming programs and many communities in urban areas

have been systematically deprived of resources necessary for a high quality of life - this includes abundant resources for nutritious food. We are committed to advocating for more resources that can help farmers of color thrive, having successful businesses and providing nourishing food to their communities all while helping their communities be resilient in the face of climate change.

Every five years, Congress renews the Farm Bill, a key piece of legislation that impacts our food, our soil and water quality, our health, and our wallets. The Farm Bill influences the type of crops farmers produce, whether farmers choose to implement conservation practices on their land, the amount of financial support available to low- income families to purchase food, and the type and price of food found on our grocers’ shelves.

In this next Farm Bill cycle, MCE will be prioritizing our advocacy around reforms that help climate-conscious farmers and historically discriminated farmers thrive. Here is an outline of what we plan to advocate for in this next Farm Bill cycle:

**1** Greater access to loans and grant programs for small-scale producers and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) producers. These loans and grants will help farmers buy equipment, develop business plans, buy land, and more - setting them up for success in the years to come in the face of climate change. Black Americans, including in Missouri, often live in communities where they are more susceptible to flooding and without abundant healthy food resources. Greater resources for BIPOC farmers will help communities build jobs in the agriculture sector, increase access to nutritious, locally-grown food in their communities, and develop green spaces that can help against the impacts of flooding, especially in urban areas.

**2** Increased funds for building up local and regional food systems, including greater “set-asides” for producers of color and BIPOC-led organizations working in local and regional food systems. These increased funds will aid BIPOC folks in building up their own local food system with urban farms, local food processing facilities, co-operative grocery stores, and other resources that create jobs and provide nutritious food.

**3** Modernization of crop insurance and commodity programs to ensure our taxpayer dollars for these programs prioritize those who actively engage in farming and who utilize conservation practices on their land. As climate change will continue to put a strain on our natural resources, farms who are proactively protecting their land from soil erosion or widespread crop loss from pests, flooding or drought, should be prioritized for crop insurance eligibility.

**4** Greater data collection by USDA of the demographics of farmers who use their programs so we can hold the USDA accountable to policy and program changes meant to create greater opportunities for beginning and BIPOC farmers.

**5** Sign up for our Federal Food Policy E-Alerts at [MOEnvironment.org](http://MOEnvironment.org) to stay informed of opportunities for action around the 2023 Farm Bill.



# Q&A WITH



## JUST MOMS STL

Educate. Organize. Empower.



Just Moms STL was formed in 2014 by Dawn Chapman and Karen Nickel to raise awareness of the issues their community was facing regarding the nuclear and other hazardous waste at West Lake Landfill in North St. Louis County, and they have been a valued partner in our coalition from their founding.

### HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT THIS PROBLEM?

**Dawn** - I had been smelling an odor, but nobody would answer about what it was. No members of the community knew what it was. I decided to call the city, and I was told to call the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). That's when I knew we're in trouble. The person from DNR spoke with me for two hours providing information. I learned that nuclear waste was sitting open in the community for decades, and it was government owned.

### CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE COLDWATER CREEK COMMUNITY?

**Karen** - Coldwater Cree, which has been contaminated since the 1950s, was a suburb which people moved to when they were looking for more space outside of the city. It had beautiful parks and green spaces that kids played in all the time. It was

the place to grow up, but we didn't know it was poisonous.

My family moved from the city to Hazelwood, only a few houses away from the creek. There were lots of parks, and kids played in them all the time. We lived our lives outside. In 2012, I was diagnosed with lupus, which made me look for a cause. That's when I found the connections between West Lake Landfill, Coldwater Creek, and health. I reached out to old friends and neighbors, only to find that many young people had passed away from rare diseases and cancers. Four other women my age were diagnosed with lupus and other rare health problems. My sister had ovarian cysts at age 11, and my neighbor had them when she was only 9. I began to connect the dots, and I realized other parents didn't know that their children were slowly being poisoned.

Simple, everyday tasks like riding bikes, eating food from our garden, and playing in parks were now dangerous. How many times was I being poisoned?

### CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT HOW BEING A WOMAN AFFECTED YOU DURING YOUR SEARCH FOR ANSWERS AND JUSTICE?

**Dawn** - It's so hard. Many people use condescending language. Many people consider us to be "bored stay at home moms." Also, cost benefit analysis for communities with these types of sites literally puts a price tag on them and affects the type of clean up done. Some communities with a "lower value" are given less of a cleanup. Stay at home moms like myself are given ZERO. Many people on government committees do not represent "regular" people that have actually been harmed, there are still a significant amount of people being left out of the conversation.

### WHAT LED YOU TO CREATE THIS ORGANIZATION?

**Dawn** - There was nothing out there when I started. There were no community organizations at that point and no community voice at the table. We named ourselves to separate and organize people in our community around the issue, and we quickly grew to over 22,000 followers. We didn't think this issue would need us involved for this long.

### DAWN CHAPMAN (LEFT) & KAREN NICKEL (RIGHT)

### WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE FOR SOLVING THIS PROBLEM?

**Dawn** - The people that Just Moms STL works with gives me hope. We have seen people face tremendous odds and overcome them. Small groups of people can make such a difference. Once you understand this, you can go into smaller communities and make change without a lot of manpower. Communities learn from each other and build each other up. Many become accidental activists.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST TRIUMPH TO COME OUT OF JUST MOMS?

**Karen** - The things that the affected communities knew to be true were acknowledged by agencies. Change has been made. The EPA has decided to remove the waste. When they remove the waste, it will go somewhere else, and we will make sure it won't hurt other people. We have been able to assist other communities and help the EPA with how to communicate risk to the public. We are succeeding!

# SETTING FARMERS UP FOR SUCCESS

Known & Grown is initiating a new process for transitioning farmers where we provide one-on-one assistance to farmers that want to implement more climate-friendly practices on their farms. This process is for farmers that currently use practices such as applying synthetic herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers and therefore would not qualify to join our Known & Grown program. With the launch of this new process, we will create a pathway for any farmer in the K&G footprint (currently 150 miles of St. Louis but we'll be expanding across the entire state of Missouri and into bordering states), to implement climate-friendly practices and join the Known & Grown program. Once the farmer makes the transition with the support of our Farm Specialist, they will be brought into the Known & Grown program where they will be connected with a network of small-scale, regenerative farmers here in the area, and they will have access to resources and our network of local food buyers that seek out Known & Grown farmer products.

Our program exists to support small-scale, regenerative farmers because farmers that use these practices often face the most barriers to success. This is due to the fact that regenerative farming practices often require more time and more money to implement. With our transitioning process, we will work directly with the farmer to identify alternative methods that are specific to their farm needs and abilities. We will work with them to implement the new practices and provide technical assistance if any challenges arise. Working with farmers to implement these climate-friendly agriculture practices is a significant way

to address the climate crisis as the agriculture industry is known to account for at least a quarter of the greenhouse gases being emitted. Agriculture has the potential to not only reduce emissions but to sequester carbon and improve the health of our planet.

With the launch of this new program, we will be able to convert more acres of land to being managed with stewardship practices. Each farmer that joins the program is celebrated for their dedication to this important work and is promoted to buyers through our social media and educational campaigns. Climate friendly practices are not only what's best for the health of our soil, water and air, but it's also what's best for the health of our communities. Known & Grown supports small-scale, regenerative, urban and rural farmers, many of which are beginners, women-owned, BIPOC, LGBTQ, or limited resources.

With the support of a farmer network, connection to local food purchasers, and one-on-one farming technical assistance, beginning and underserved farmers have a greater chance of sustaining their farming businesses and growing the local food movement.



# AIR QUALITY MONITORING NEAR CAFOS PROJECT



Communities across Missouri are impacted by air pollution: whether poor air quality is driving up asthma rates or the odors from a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) are driving down property values. We know the importance of clean air, and yet we have shockingly little information about what we're breathing. There are 63 active air quality monitoring sites in Missouri and at least one-fifth of these monitors are in Kansas City or St. Louis, leaving most of our state without air quality data. In an effort to close this gap, MCE is excited to launch a community science-based air

(ammonia) and decomposing animal waste (both). Based on a North Carolina study, average ammonia concentrations in areas downwind of hog farms are up to 3 times higher than other areas within the same watershed. Particulate matter (PM) emissions are fine particles suspended in air. In primarily-agricultural areas, PM can come from tillage dust, field burns, fuel combustion, animal feed, dander, feathers and waste. When PM is inhaled, it can cause serious health problems. In fact, tens of thousands of deaths in the U.S. each year are attributed to agricultural PM.

“ There are 63 active air quality monitoring sites in Missouri and at least one-fifth of these monitors are in Kansas City or St. Louis, leaving most of our state without air quality data.

Collecting reliable, public air quality data, will help us start to understand local levels of these emissions in parts of rural Missouri, and their impacts on community health and the environment. MCE is working in parallel with like-minded organizations to increase public air quality data across the state. In our

quality monitoring project this spring. MCE will be partnering with community groups and individuals to install low-cost air quality sensors for ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and particulate matter (PM) emissions in rural Missouri.

long-term vision, all Missourians have access to reliable local air quality data, information about how local air quality impacts their health, and can use this information to advocate for public health and environmental protections.

For some of us, air pollution brings to mind images of tailpipe exhaust, fossil fuel power plants, or urban smog, but industrial agriculture is also a major source of harmful air emissions. Ammonia and hydrogen sulfide are highly-odorous respiratory irritants that commonly come from commercial fertilizers

**LEARN MORE ABOUT AIR QUALITY MONITORING EFFORTS & OPTIONS FOR LOW-COST AIR QUALITY MONITORING:**  
Sophie Watterson, Policy Coordinator  
[swatterson@moenvironment.org](mailto:swatterson@moenvironment.org)  
(314)-727-0600 ext. 113

# PROTECTING MISSOURI'S WATER: WATER QUALITY IN THE COMMUNITY

This year's World Water Day celebrated groundwater: the "hidden" water resources that are critical to sustaining healthy ecosystems, supporting agriculture and many other industries, but have not always been fully considered in policy making. One place this holds true is with our drinking water.

Groundwater is the main source of drinking water for many Missourians, and groundwater supplies nearly all of Missourians who use private water wells. Unlike public water systems, private, domestic water wells are not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) and, therefore, they aren't regularly monitored or treated for contaminants that can be harmful to human health.

As communities across the country have seen, nitrate contamination is a major concern for private well water users. Nitrate is one of the most common groundwater pollutants in the United States, especially in rural areas where manure and commercial fertilizer application is high. Nitrate contamination is a particular health risk for infants,

who can develop a potentially-fatal condition called blue baby syndrome. Nitrate contamination can also cause birth defects, increased rates of cancer and thyroid disease. Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Nebraska and other neighboring agricultural states have conducted studies on the risk of nitrate contamination in drinking water and found between 10-40% nitrate contamination in private wells - but we don't have similar data in Missouri.

To better understand these public health risks in our state, MCE is seeking to partner with interested well owners and volunteers to collect reliable water quality data using community science methods. In our long-term vision, private well owners know where and how to regularly monitor their water, address concerns, and advocate for lasting policy change to better protect Missouri groundwater from harmful pollutants like nitrate. If you want to learn more about MCE's water quality monitoring efforts, contact MCE's Policy Coordinator Sophie Watterson or MCE's Outreach Specialist Jim Karpowicz.

## BOOSTING THE EFFORTS OF ECO-FRIENDLY FARMS



Missouri is one of our country's largest producers of agricultural products, and MCE has been engaged for decades holding factory farms accountable and supporting the efforts of eco-friendly ones throughout our state. HB 2720, the Specialty Agricultural Crops Act, is a bill MCE drafted that will create a new loan program to help small local farmers grow even more fruits and vegetables deemed "specialty crops" in the state! This bill is sponsored by Rep. Emily Weber (D-Kansas City) and co-sponsored by Rep. Jeff Knight (R-Lebanon). The companion Senate Bill 1157 is sponsored by Senator Justin Brown (R-Rolla).

Both HB 2720 and Senate Bill 1157 received hearings and bipartisan unanimous support to "Do Pass" from committees to further their passage.

Supporting small-scale farms who grow specialty crops will provide substantial nutritious food for local communities to purchase and consume along with helping build soil health on these farms by way of growing multiple types of crops on the

same field. The term "specialty crops" also covers a wide array of important products, such as tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture.

Another bill we helped draft this legislative session is HB 2833, again sponsored by Rep. Emily Weber with co-sponsor Rep. Yolanda Young (D-Kansas City). This bill includes formulating policies and programs to improve soil and watershed health. Any attempt to improve the health of soil in our state produces healthier food, protects water quality, improves biological and microbiological diversity, improves biodiversity, and also improves farmland ability to capture carbon to retain in the soil.

How we grow our food makes an enormous difference on our water and air quality as well as our ability to combat climate change. MCE will continue leading the way to make Missouri a model for eco-friendly farming practices. **STAY INFORMED AT MOENVIORNMENT.ORG**

Missouri Department of Natural Resources. (2021). Missouri Department of Natural Resources makes ArcGIS app available for locating groundwater observation wells. <https://dnr.mo.gov/communications/news/missouri-department-natural-resources-makes-arcgis-app-available-locating-groundwater-observation-wells#:~:text=%E2%80%9CGroundwater%20is%20a%20main%20source%20of%20drinking%20water,rural%20residents%20who%20use%20individual%20private%20water%20wells.>

Wisconsin Department of Health Services.(2019). High levels of nitrate in drinking water can affect everyone. <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02559.pdf>.

Environmental Working Group. (2019). Iowa's Private Wells Contaminated by Nitrate and Bacteria. [https://www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019\\_iowa\\_wells/](https://www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019_iowa_wells/).

Prairie Rivers Network. (2021). What's in Your Well? The Hidden Dangers of Nitrates in Rural Drinking Water. <https://prairierivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/whats-in-your-well-final.pdf>.

Lane, A.D., Kirk, M.F., Whittemore, D.O. et al. Long-term (1970s–2016) changes in groundwater geochemistry in the High Plains aquifer in south-central Kansas, USA. *Hydrogeol J* 28, 491–501 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10040-019-02083-z>.

## NEW STAFF ALERT: MOESHA BAPTISTE



Moesha Baptiste, Community Outreach Specialist. Moesha brings experience working alongside communities in Virginia, and is finishing her Master of Public Administration degree at University of Missouri Kansas City. Moesha will be leading our outreach efforts in North St. Louis City and County related to the hazardous waste sites impacting those communities. Moesha also speaks Haitian-Creole, and she enjoys spending time with her family and friends. Welcome!

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kally Coleman, Board President  
Debbie Njai, Board Vice President  
Dawn T. Christoffersen, Board Secretary  
Nygel Williams, Board Treasurer

Steve Brewer, Antonia Burgess  
Rev. Rodrick Burton, David Garin  
Deidre Griffith, David Lobbig  
Steve Mahfood, Bryan Meyers  
Angela A. Moore, Arlene Sandler  
Gwendolyn Verhoff, Eric Wilkinson

## STAFF

Jared Opsal, Executive Director  
Christen Commuso, Operations Coordinator  
Carmen Harris, Membership Coordinator  
Jim Karpowicz, Community Outreach Specialist  
Moesha Baptiste, Community Outreach Specialist  
Rae Miller, Community Outreach Director  
Melissa Vatterott, Policy Director  
Sophie Watterson, Policy Coordinator

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



@MOENVIRONMENT

Missouri Coalition for the Environment  
725 Kingsland Ave. Suite 100  
St. Louis, MO 63130  
(314) 727-0600  
moenviron@moenvironment.org



Thank you to everyone who turned up and made our first two events of 2022 a great success. Our honeysuckle removal at historic Greenwood Cemetery and our Eco Tour at Such & Such Farms proved that we can have fun while making an impact.



What's next? We've got more Eco Tours planned, a series of happy hours called Chats for Change, and some volunteer opportunities at upcoming St. Louis Cardinals' Games.



Don't miss out on the next fun event or volunteer opportunity. Register for our e-alerts at MOEnvironment.

Missouri Coalition for the environment's Alert newsletter is published twice each calendar year. This newsletter is for informational purposes only. All opinions and estimates in the Alert constitute the best judgement of MCE and its contributors but are subject to change without notice. Reproduction of articles for publication is prohibited without permission of the publisher. Sign up for our e-alerts and stay current with environmental news. Visit us online at [www.moenvironment.org](http://www.moenvironment.org)